

**GOOD SHEPHERD CHILD DEVELOPMENT CENTER  
MILFORD, CONNECTICUT**

**Testimony on HB 5557**

**An Act Concerning Recruitment and Retention of Early Childhood Teachers**

In a recently released 2014 study by the University of California at Berkeley, *Worthy Work, STILL Unlivable Wages: The Early Childhood Workforce 25 Years after the National Child Care Staffing Study*;

It states "...as was true in 1989, childcare workers **still** earn less than adults who take care of animals, and barely more than fast food cooks."

Senator Slossberg, Representative Fleischmann and Members of the Committee:

My name is Gloria Hayes and I am the Executive Director of Good Shepherd Child Development Center. We provide early care and education for children ages six weeks to five years. The center is licensed for fifty-six infants and toddlers and thirty-six preschoolers. We have been serving children and families in the greater Milford area since 1969. Through a Fee for Service Contract with the Connecticut Office of Early Childhood, we offer twenty-three sliding scale slots for infants and toddlers and twenty-nine sliding scale slots for preschool children. Other families pay a flat fee. Our sliding scale slots are only available to working families whose gross earnings are less than 75% of the State Median Income. Proof of income is required.

I want to thank the Education Committee for raising HB 5557 which finally calls attention to the low pay rates for teachers in State Funded Child Development Centers and School Readiness Programs that must meet the education credentials and program accreditation in CGA 10-16p.

This bill would require the Office of Early Childhood to increase reimbursement rates to phase in a compensation schedule to raise teacher salaries to help recruit and retain qualified teachers. With the current budget crisis, we ask that within the funding streams for publically funded child care and preschool programs that raising salaries be made a priority.

I have been the Executive Director here for almost 40 years. Hiring and maintaining qualified staff is one of the hardest parts of my job. Staff qualifications keep increasing, but there is no compensation attached. By July 1, 2017 one half of teachers have to have a BA degree in Early Childhood Education or a closely related field, and the other half have to have AA degrees. Teachers who obtain their BA degrees most often leave to work in another setting where the salary is higher. That has happened here twice in the last eight months. A stable staff is extremely important when one is caring for very young children. A higher starting salary with provisions for regular increases is vital in acquiring and keeping qualified staff.

One of the reasons that we do not have sufficient funds to adequately pay staff is the low reimbursement rates. Currently, in State Funded Centers, reimbursement rates for infants and toddlers remains the same as preschool in spite of the fact that infant/toddler programs cost nearly double what preschool costs due to smaller class sizes and more than double the staff/child ration (4/1 vs. 10/1). In the 2015/16 state budget, School Readiness preschool programs received an increase in reimbursement rates \$300 higher than State Funded Centers even though both programs do the same work and must meet the same requirements. This disparity needs to be addressed quickly before an even greater disparity happens.

As part of the Connecticut State Funded Child Development Centers (CDC's) we serve mainly low and moderate income families. Child care programs are not a baby sitting service. We are required to maintain accreditation through the National Association for the Education of Young Children, a standard rigorous to achieve and maintain. In addition, we are an important part of the economy. Our services allow parents to work and be productive members of society.

In this very difficult year as the State faces a large deficit, one would ask where can funds be found to support higher wages for child care teachers. Here are some suggestions:

1. Focus on quality childcare for working parents: There should be a temporary moratorium on new slots to be allocated for Smart Start, School Readiness, or any other preschool program. Funding in the budget for those new slots should be repurposed to maintain and augment reimbursement rates to increase wages to stabilize the child care industry.
2. Reduce funding for expansion of the Quality Improvement System and **focus on direct services to children and families**. State Funded Centers are required to be NAEYC accredited and teachers must have BA degrees by 2020. Extending Quality Improvement measures (QIS) to all child care settings stretches scarce resources and should be delayed until appropriate dollars are put into the system.
3. Establish equity among all state early childhood programs including those offered by local school districts relative to rates, requirements, parent fees, data collection, etc.
4. Delay implementation of costly regulations in the new State Child Care Plan. Ct. relies on the Child Care Development Block Grant, known as Care4 Kids, to fund child care in all types of settings: State funded center; family child care; and kith and kin. (At Good Shepherd, Care4 Kids is an extremely important source of income in helping us meet all of our obligations. A loss or decrease in those funds would have a very negative impact on the program.)

Teachers in State Funded Centers and School Readiness Programs work with children and families of low and moderate income. The influence these teachers have on the developing minds of young children is so important to their future success. They deserve to be paid a living wage. I ask the Legislature to support HB 5557 and direct the Office of Early Childhood to make this a budget priority. Thank you for your consideration of this bill.

